

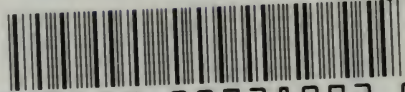


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AFTERGLOW

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

Syrinx (1914)

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TRANSLATIONS:

Pierre Louys:

Aphrodite (1913, 1919)

The Songs of Bilitis (1919)

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AFTERGLOW

Pastels of Greek Egypt
69 B. C.

By

MITCHELL S. BUCK

With a Preface

By

ARTHUR MACHEN

New York

NICHOLAS L. BROWN

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PREFACE

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PREFACE

I

ALL words are more or less misconstrued and misunderstood; none more grievously than the word "Paganism". Paganism is conceived generally to be that state of the ancient world, Greek and Roman, but chiefly Greek, in which men lived in a kind of Abbey of Thelema, doing what they would, satisfying the flesh according to their desires, devoid of morals altogether, using the word "morals" in its customary modern sense. Insensibly, when anyone speaks of Paganism, one thinks of garlands and dances, of the Bacchic fury, of the breasts of the nymph in the brake, of the Satyrs lurking in the grove of dark ilexes. You could do as you pleased; there was no law to restrain you, from within or from without. As for the gods, they were but pleasing fictions, invented by the poets

as a kind of gilt on the gingerbread of lechery; but nobody took the gods seriously. Such, we are apt to think, was Paganism.

It was nothing of the kind; that is, in the heroic age of Greece, certainly not in the age when Socrates, about to drink the hemlock, discoursed to his disciples of immortal life in the essence of the Godhead. They were no flowery and careless voluptuaries who listened to certain rituals of predestination that have survived to our days. We can read in them still of the doom that awaits proud and insolent men, owning no master in heaven or earth; of the manner in which the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation; of the vengeance that lies in wait for the spiller of blood; of the remorseless decrees of destiny; and of making atonement for transgression. Such are the topics of these sermons and

rituals, which are known to us as Greek Plays. Paganism, in its pure and uncorrupted state was, evidently, a good deal more than an elegant and poetic Bank Holiday, a perpetual riot, a rosy debauch. It had its austere side; perhaps it was, in its essence, as austere as New England in the seventeenth century; though, to be sure, it wore its robes with a better grace and had somewhat a different set of taboos and commands. The descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers hanged witches; the Athenians judged the men who profaned or divulged the holy Mysteries of Eleusis to be worthy of death.

Such then was Paganism in the days of its covenant; something more than a be-decked and fleshy revel. But in the time of its dissolution, I have no doubt that it had taken on some semblance of our popular notion of it.

The Alexandria which Mr. Buck has shown in such glowing and coloured pictures, on which the ancient and golden sunlight still shines and burns, was in a sense, an Abbey of Thelema. Men did as they pleased, and all that pleased them was sensual pleasure. To be sure, they still talked of the gods. They talked of Aphrodite; but Aphrodite was only an excuse; just as, to the bad Mason, a certain very solemn and awful ceremony is only an excuse for the banquet which follows it.

II

Yet all the while there was a sense, sometimes conscious, sometimes sub-conscious, that it wouldn't do. In Mr. Buck's pages you will find this half-murmur of dissatisfaction, the sad murmur which finds its expression in the lines:

*Medio de fonte Eporum
Surgit amari aliquid.*

In the long run it was felt that mere pleasure failed to please. Men were evidently unable to live wholly in the body and by the body and for the body; there was some unknown element missing, and all became savourless, even deadly. Everywhere there was pleasure; nowhere was there joy. For this people had lost the old austere joys of true Paganism; they were nowise of the race of those Spartans who perished so splendidly in resisting the invasion of Greece by the Persian King; the Greek theatre had given place to the gaudy savagery of the Circus games; the old patriot city states were submerged by an orientalized cosmopolitanism. One got tired, it seemed, of wearing roses and worshipping Aphrodite; but what else was there to do? Really, it seemed, nothing;

or nothing what was worth doing. One might say that Paganism was dissolving into a melancholy boredom, into that state of mind which afterwards was called *accidia* and accounted one of the deadly sins. Indeed, the sun had set. The sky was still lighted; but black clouds were gathering from all quarters of the heavens; and that red light in the west—was it not as if the roses were being changed into burning flames. Well has Mr. Buck named these pastels of his “Afterglow”.

III

One may say that the failure of this Paganism, which had become a decorated materialism, was the failure of a great experiment. The world of that day was endeavouring to live by bread alone; bread being understood to include:

“A profusion of meats and viands, oysters, lampreys, quails, roasted swans, wild boar, sauces and relishes, cakes of various grains mingled with honey, fruits and sherbets: all that the caprices of taste could suggest.”

Add to this definition of bread: “Kraters of rich wine, cooled in snow brought laboriously from long distances”, add even, “a group of slave girls . . . of selected beauty, nude except for their conventional girdles” —such was the bread on which the Alexandrian world tried to live. And, really, they did their best. They avoided the error of spoiling the ship for a ha’porth of tar. The Great Experiment was made completely, splendidly. The dough of this bread of theirs was of the very finest flour; it was served on a lordly dish, in a hall of great worship; it was brought to the board with all the daughters of music singing before it. I doubt whether this

assay of bread can ever be conducted with such gorgeous circumstance again. And, besides, the whole thing was done without any self-consciousness. The company wore their wreaths of roses naturally, without the slightest sense of dressing-up or "making-believe"—or of making fools of themselves. In these days, the attempt at the revel is still made; but it is somewhat pathetic. We have lost the art of wearing garlands, and our attempts at revelry are more depressing than the spectacle of High School mistresses dancing the Morris. No; Alexandria did the thing in style; and yet, it seems, it was all a failure at best. Man found that he could not live on bread alone; that is, purely in the material world.

But let it not be supposed that I consider this Great Experiment as a self-evident absurdity, foredoomed to failure from the

very nature of the quest. Very far from it. On the contrary, so much is the Alexandrian plan the obvious plan, that to this day many of us attempt to carry it out, in spite of its failure, in spite of the disadvantageous circumstances under which we must conduct our operations, in spite of the fact that the Kraters of rare wine cooled with snow have given place to whiskey that is dubious in England and not at all dubious in America. In spite of all, we do our best to be Alexandrians, since their way seems after all the certain way, the only way that is certain. Mr. Buck's Philosopher found the talk of the priests intolerable; and so many of us find the talk of our priests intolerable. After all, it is only the body and the things of the body which appear certain to the natural man. The philosophers may call them shadows and phantoms, but we are not philosophers. There is a legend that the great Newman

was wont to regard his Cardinal's Hat and to murmur to himself: "Everything is uncertain except this: that there is a Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church and that I am a Cardinal of it: for here is the hat—there is no doubt about that, at all events." The legend is, of course, a lie; but one understands the sentiment beneath it. We are quite sure of our bodies. We know that ginger is hot in the mouth. We may not know why it is hot; but as to the fact of the heat of the ginger, there is no room for argument about that. And that fact and other facts congruous therewith, the pleasant uses of wine and women, the delight of coolness afforded in summer, of a flaming hearth in winter, of a noble feast when one is hungry: these are beyond denial. And, as to all else, what do we know? "Is there a God?" asks St. Thomas Aquinas, opening his great treatise; and his answer is, "Apparently not".

Mark the emphasis on "apparently"; but do not most of us live only in appearances, in phenomena, in the world wherein ginger is hot, and meat satisfies hunger, and drink quenches thirst, and women appease desire? All this we know certainly; beyond this we are in a world of conjecture, theory, dream, mystery, vague possibility. There may be a God, our bodies may be the mere veils of the spirit, the mind may be one of this spirit's instruments. All this may be so, but we do not know that it is so. We do know that when men who believe in these unseen realities, as they call them, begin to discuss matters of God, soul, mind or spirit, they immediately begin to differ violently, to enter into endless arguments, to start debates that endure for aeons and yet are never resolved. Now, we may urge, there is no argument, no quarrel, when it is a question of a hungry man eating or of a thirsty man quenching his

thirst; here there are no two opinions but the undivided consent of all mankind; here, in a word, we are on sure ground. Why should we leave it for a territory which is all uncertain, misty, doubtful and, it is possible, fabulous? There are charts of the unknown ocean, it is true, but there are too many of them and no two are alike, and each pilot utterly derides and abhors the navigation of the others, and they only agree in this: that the voyage is certainly dark and dangerous. Is it not better to remain on the firm land, in the sunlight, satisfying the desires of the body?

Such was the Alexandrian position. It seems to me a very strong one; almost, one would say, inexpugnable. Yet these people, who lived as they pleased, who were untroubled by ethical systems or the reproach of conscience, who could satisfy the desires of the body without fear of reproach from within or of censure and

punishment from without, were ill at ease. As Mr. W. L. Courtney tells us, when the first century before Christ was drawing to its close, the whole of the Mediterranean shore was anxiously and restlessly seeking for something that it called *soteria* or salvation. And it seems clear that, whatever *soteria* may be, it is not good to eat or to drink. In fine, the red roses and the ivory flesh of the girls had alike grown grey; meat and drink were bitter in the mouth.

The only thing that can be urged against the Alexandrian theory of life is this: it didn't work.

ARTHUR MACHEN

THE PHILOSOPHER
THE COURTESAN
THE PRIEST
THE GREEK
THE PHARAOH
THE SHEPHERDESS

THE PHILOSOPHER

Friend, thou art no longer young, and thou art unhappy. Thy garden, once so lovely, is in ruins. See; even the god has toppled over among the flowers.

The walls of thy house echo coldly to the distant laughter of thine own youthful voice and the laughter and sighs of those whose very names thou hast forgotten. The guests who come to thee now, come for thy food and wines; they depart, mocking thee along the highway.

Thou shouldst build thyself a new dwelling, at the border of a forest where silence holds no corruption. And, with the nymphs, thou shouldst sacrifice to other gods, at a flat rock lit by slanting rays of sunlight through the trees.

"Thessalos! My friend! Greeting to thee!"

A hand descended on the Greek's shoulder. He turned.

"Ah, Nisos! To thee, greeting. This is a surprise. I heard thou wert in Rome."

Nisos laughed.

"I have been in Mitylene and in Syracuse as well as Rome. Thou seest me greatly changed. I did not enjoy myself in Rome. They expect us there, to teach them how to understand our philosophers, how to appreciate our statues, how to copy our architecture; but they hate us for the birthright they can never have, yet which is ours without asking. They did not make things easy for me; in return I will admit I lavished no affection on them. And here I am. Alexandria is more to my liking."

Thessalos smiled, stroking his beard. Nisos resumed.

"All that matters little, now. In this

city, everyone is welcome. But thou— thou also wilt soon travel, my friend, if all I hear of thee is true. Since I saw thee last, thy fame has multiplied upon itself and I have heard much of thee and of thy work in the schools here. I believe thou art a sensation of even this city, where new opinions are a daily occurrence and where marvelous complexities of thought awaken but a passing flash of interest. There has been no such agitation since thy friend, old Aristarchus, started us rolling around the sun. I hear that every priest in the city, from the temples of Isis, Serapis, Amon and, more especially, Aphrodite, has sworn to drive thee away for spreading thy questionings. Have I heard truly?"

"Let us walk, and I will tell thee."

It was the hour of evening, and the broad avenue through the Brucheum, the promenade of the royal quarter, was crowded with a throng of all ages and all

peoples. There were Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Jews, dwellers of the desert. There were innumerable women, clad in costumes of all colors, laden with jewels in gold or silver or the blue clay of the Egyptians. Many of these were courtesans who moved proudly in conscious beauty among the groups of men. Here and there, a poor girl, clad simply in a rough tunic, walked with downcast eyes, darting an occasional appealing glance at men who turned carelessly away to admire her more richly bedecked rivals. The wide street was paved with marble. All about uprose the porches and columns of magnificent palaces, overtopped, beyond, with the golden roof of the Sena.

Thessalos had seen nearly three score years and his hair and beard were white. Yet he walked erect with a firm step, and seemed more like a soldier than a diligent

and accomplished student of the philosophies of the world.

“Yes,” he said, “the priests do not like me, to say the least. But, Nisos, I could not remain silent before their babbled nonsense. All my life, I have studied and observed earnestly, in an effort to perceive the truth of things. Thou knowest this. Life is a mystery. I dared hope I might, in some way, aid in finding the solution of that mystery and a purpose for the existence of man.

“Some say that nothing is real to us except our souls, all else being a delusion born of ignorance. These men sit for untold years in silent, motionless meditation, fed by the charity of passers-by, watching without emotion their limbs consumed by ulcers and sores. The grasses and vines overwhelm them and unite with the hair of their heads and, in the end, they die—in silence. How strange such men are to

our instinct! Others say the object of life is life itself and that each day should be lived for what it is, for whatever it brings us. You know these philosophers. Drunkenness, outrage, debauch! And through it all they smile and leer! . . . Others will question nothing. These men live by faith alone, and the inscrutable condensation of deity, thanking the gods for every breath they draw, for everything and anything which comes to them, their eyes turned continually toward the heavens or their quaking forms prostrate before the altars in the sanctuaries.

“All these and a hundred more! And in this city which makes liars or fools of them all! Here in Alexandria, I have seen horrors and misery without end. I have seen people starving, begging on their knees for even a piece of bread, that they might sustain themselves yet a little longer for future misfortunes. Men are slain in the night,

for a piece of silver. I have seen young girls, not even nubile, soliciting the embraces of brutal men, in order to receive the few oboli necessary to purchase their scraps of food . . . Look at these women! A whole people mad with luxury and lust, to snatch the pleasures of a moment. While, in the schools, priests and philosophers deliberate the essence of the soul and the manifestations of the gods!"

The two men had turned from the crowded promenade along a wide street and into the cool green of the Gardens.

"All these abuses," remarked Nisos, "are lamentable. Yet unhappiness, or disbelief in the gods, will not mend them. With sorrows and abuses, there are also beauties in life, if one can see them."

"And thou canst?"

"I have my own philosophy, perhaps intolerable to thee, but sufficient to my needs. I am content. But thou art not;

and it is only unhappiness and disbelief which thou canst give to others. If the priests thou disdainest can give no truth, and cannot argue the injustice out of life, at least they can give solace. Has thou realized that, my friend?

“It is not difficult to believe in the gods, although their ways may be strange to us . . . Forget for a moment, the life about thee. Is Amon of the Egyptians only a name, a statue, a painting? Is Zeus an idealism, whose thunderbolts must be the accidents of a blind nature only? Is Dis the fabled ruler of an impossible underworld, and are all the inhabitants of our ancient Olympus the picturings of a childish fancy? Dost thou not believe in Aphrodite? Dost thou deny Demeter, while enjoying her gifts? Tell me if these are not magnificent mysteries? Wilt thou say they mean nothing at all?”

The two seated themselves on a bench

near the door of a little silent house, at the side of the path.

The short twilight had deepened. Among the trees, night had already come. The leafy branches lay black against the darkening blue of the sky where there lingered still a pale, cold light. Here and there, a bright star twinkled.

Thessalos rested his forehead on his palm, in silence.

Nisos adjusted his robe, thought for a moment, and resumed.

“I think it is less disbelief than perplexity which troubles thee. But the gods do not ask understanding. How couldst thou hope to understand, or why? Perhaps the gods themselves are but manifestations of something which lies beyond. Can we question that greater spirit, of which our Pan was but the earliest conception, which moves in the heart of all things, which brings the grain forth from the ground

into the sunlight, which stirs the sap of the trees and loads the vine with grapes, because men work injustice on one another? Is it less present because we cannot understand, because we have seen the grain broken by hail and the grapes torn from the vines by bellowing winds?

“These very gardens are a place of worship for that Aphrodite whose ways displease thee but of whom thou really knowest nothing. Her spirit is in all things and in all creatures. The most wretched prostitute is not ignorant of her, nor the richest and most voluptuous empress and queen. The very beasts of the fields warm to her touch; the swaying branches of the palms breathe her name. In the shadowy depths of the sea, her spirit moves among pearly shells and branches of pink coral. And the creature which has, for an instant only, received her gifts, has not lived in vain . . .”

The door of the house behind them opened slowly, and a young girl appeared. She was dressed very simply and wore no jewels. Her eyes were red, a little, and her cheeks still bore traces of tears. But she smiled.

"Can I bring thee any pleasure?" she asked, timidly.

Thessalos threw a troubled glance at Nisos, who had turned toward the girl.

"Dost thou believe in the gods?"

The girl looked surprised.

"I believe in Aphrodite. That is enough for me."

"And dost thou really wish to please me?"

"Oh . . . Yes!"

Night had completely fallen. Nisos arose from the bench, in the shaft of yellow light which streamed from the door.

"It is possible," he said.

THE COURTESAN

*“Il ne restait plus devant l’Idole
qu’une enfant tout rougissante qui
s’était mise le dernière.”*

PIERRE LOUYS
APHRODITE

If thou wouldst drink, I will sing thee a song of Anacreon's while thy gaze idles through wine glowing in a cup of crystal. Thy spirit will awake; happiness will envelop thee. While thou drainest the cup, the song will rise and beat to the beating of thine own madness and thy joy.

Or perhaps thou wouldst rest where the fresh air of the night may touch thee. Thou wouldst know the stars above thee, the soft rustlings in the trees, perhaps the distant call of some bird. Thus, I would sing thee, gently, a song of Sappho's, deep with longing, blending with the shadows and the silence.

If these, even, are not all thou wishest, then I will sing thee other songs. Voluptuousness will overwhelm thee; thou wilt forget the purpled night; even the wine cup will fall unheeded to the ground.

Iris cast herself, face down, upon the soft grass at the foot of a great tree, rested her eyes upon her crossed arms and, at last, burst into sobs. For many days she had been sheltered only by the trees which lifted about her like columns, their interlaced branches softening the glare of day to a twilight and deepening the night into impenetrable darkness. For two days she had even tasted no food except a cake of wheat she had begged at the Temple, and a little fruit she had found on one of the forest paths. Her last ragged garment had fallen from her; she had only a coarse linen scarf, too small to cover the half of her body. She had not even a pin or ribbon with which to fasten the dark hair which fell in tangled ringlets over her shoulders.

The men had turned from her; the women avoided her. She was alone, scorned, buffeted by the elements. Her

skin was marked by the grasses and twigs which had formed her savage bed.

Night was creeping over the world. In the west, a narrow ribbon of scarlet between dark clouds glowed with the dying fire of the sun. The air was very still; even the twittering of the birds was subdued and timorous.

Iris, her heart beating upon the earth, could feel the spreading silence. Gradually her weeping ceased; the pangs of hunger became less intense, softening to a dull, heavy ache which was easier to bear. A lumbering beetle, all purple and gold, fumbled through the grass, climbed upon her thigh, and scraped over her body, unmolested. She dreamed with terrible clarity of the hopeless agony into which she had fallen; and, as she lay, the scenes of her life peopled her visions with the luxuries of years gone by.

She recalled the day, fifteen years before, when she had entered the Temple of the Goddess, a child of twelve and, stripping herself of her robes before the statue of the Aphrodite, had offered her childish body for the service of the goddess and the labors of love. She was surrounded by beautiful courtesans in costumes of bright colors; the perfume of incense rose about her in clouds through which murmured soft words of devotion and the voices of harps and reeds. She remembered, too, her surprise and delight, the heap of offerings—doves, cakes of honey, veils, jewels—she had seen lying at the feet of the goddess, placed there, one by one, by the suppliants upon that day of festival. And she remembered the old, gentle-eyed priest who had placed his arm about her and led her away.

Nor had she forgotten her first love . . .

She trembled now, against the warm earth, as this returned to her memory.

Her breasts had become rounded and firm, her eyes clear, her lips full and red, tremulous with the eagerness of youth. Each day she was filled with an intoxicating presage, half daring, half fearful; until at last overwhelming desire, the call of the goddess, had seized her. That day, she had told of her desire; and her life as a devotee of the Immortal had begun.

The man she had chosen (or who had chosen her; she had never quite known which) was a Greek, tall, clean-limbed, soft and beautiful as a god. His ardent gaze had pierced her like an arrow and she had quivered in terror beneath the caress of his hands . . . The goddess had given her a little white house; and there, for two whole days, they had shut out the world, eating fruits and cakes of honey, drinking soft wines, playing and laughing

like two children. The Greek had spilled gold like water . . . Then, still smiling, he had bestowed a parting caress—and gone away. She had never been able to find him again.

For three days after that, she had remained alone, refusing admittance to all, although her beauty, her naïve charm, had already been rumored among the wealthy young Greeks, and her threshold was continually buried under innumerable fruits, flowers and passionate letters . . . Outstretched and motionless upon her couch, her eyes unseeing, her heart throbbing in remembrance, she had felt her little soul unfolding to a new world.

Then, at last, with a trembling sigh, she had opened her door and had caused her name to be written there in Greek and in Egyptian. And lovers had come, curious at first, then supplicating, demanding, intoxicated with her lithe freshness, the wist-

ful smile which trembled at the corners of her childish mouth. As she was beautiful and much desired, she had selected her lovers daintily, choosing only those who were fair and who pleased her, refusing herself to the others. And her fame had spread for a day, even over Alexandria where beauty was seen on every hand and over which the perfume of love hovered like a luminous cloud, as the poets had said.

Even the philosophers had come to her, and she had received them with a little laugh, proud of her triumph over them, and had pulled their grey beards and ruffled their hair, mimicking their ponderous attempts to retain a profound dignity. But these men had pleased her but little, for she soon perceived their hypocrisy and listened with secret contempt to the weighty arguments and involved phrases by which they sought to include their pas-

sion in their philosophy. All men had written their names upon the walls of her chamber; there were epigrams, ardent and obscene, written by city dignitaries and scholars, and sketches by artists whose fame had spread over the antique world.

The life had been care-free and happy; all the wonders of the world were brought before her door.

So the years had flown, unnoticed, over her head. A life of unceasing pleasure had shortened the hours. Her body had become harder, the contours more pronounced; her breasts had softened.

Then, one by one, her lovers had turned from her. Guests who had made merry at her banquets, bathing their bodies in her choicest wines, left her for rivals less beautiful, less accomplished, but more youthful. Even the young men passed quickly by her door . . . She knew she was still beautiful. She had doubled her

offerings to the goddess; she had spent long hours over her toilette; she had appeared on the streets in her most beautiful vestments and jewels.

But misfortune, having found her, remained always near . . . At last she had been obliged to sell her jewels in order to buy food. The walls of her house, which had echoed music and laughter, became strangely silent. Poverty overwhelmed her. She became thinner; a delicate pallor settled over her cheeks. Weeping, uncomprehending, she had at last parted with her house and had entered the wood to dwell among the courtesans who were old or suffering from misfortune like herself.

*

* *

The tremble of a step upon the earth roused her. Languidly, she raised her

head and saw a man, one of the poor Egyptians, standing near her.

Two days before, she would have welcomed one of these men who sometimes entered the wood, paying a few oboli for the favors of the poor courtesans. But, this night, she felt that her life was over; she felt that she was going to die. The thought of love sickened her.

She shook her head wearily and dropped it once more upon her arms. But the man, with a rough laugh, bent down and clasped her. She struggled weakly for a moment, but had no strength. Her subdued cry awoke the echo of a laugh among the trees . . .

*

* *

Awkwardly, the man thrust three coppers into her hand, and shambled away into the darkness.

For a long time she lay silent, overwhelmed with lassitude. Her flesh appeared greenish-white in the gloom. A perfumed breeze of the night, slipping among the trees, gently fanned her outstretched body.

Then, gradually, the weight of the coins in her palm penetrated to her numbed thought. A new hope awoke within her; her mind slowly cleared; in spite of herself she realized, little by little, that she could buy food . . . With an inarticulate cry, which was half a sob, she staggered to her feet and stumbled away among the trees . . .

THE PRIEST

Lo, thou art more than a father; for this is a man-child which I place in thine arms. Have I not done well? He is the fruit of thy power and of my beauty. He is the spirit of youth renewed; thy son and thine heir.

See, he sleeps, dreaming of mighty deeds. He will grow, as thou didst grow; he will become strong and beautiful and brave. He will bear thy name, as those after him will bear it, and will revere thee. The sons of his sons will revere thee through long ages.

I am Septi, a priest of Holy Isis, and I write in the reign of the twelfth Ptolemy. Full three-score of years have passed over my head, forgetting not their toll as they moved; and thus it is that I sit within my chamber and dream, not of that which is to come, like a youth, but of those things which are behind me. For the fountains of my youth and life are long since dried and as though covered by the desert sands.

Across my vision flit shadowy figures of the past. They slip through the veil to smile at me and beckon, moving their lips as though they spoke; but I close my understanding and hear them not, lest they draw me to them before my time.

Among the faintly tinted throng there is one who never smiles and who speaks no word . . . How many years ago she lived! How many years ago lived the youth who loved her! . . .

The temple of my goddess is racked

and broken. Few people are seen here, now. And I, an old man, a servant of the gods, would spend an hour dreaming of dead days . . .

There was one mortal woman, only, in my life. In this mad age wherein this arid land blooms with a sinister and pulsing growth of women's flesh, certainly the remembrance of one woman only is strange enough. Yet so it was. She was a maiden named Aalea whom I met by chance, lost, upon the river bank, and escorted, without wayward thought, to her father's door. She was the daughter of a merchant and she was very beautiful, slender and sweet.

Often there comes to me the thought that the mission of woman to man is less to comfort than to wound. Many a noble man, greater than I, would gladly live in quiet, with his wife, the years allotted to him. Yet, how often such men have been

shocked into action and a search for greater things by the faithlessness of the mortal woman held most dear! Even a woman taken as the plaything of a day, may do this great but thankless thing.

The girl Aalea was, to me, a promise and a hope. I saw her often and was welcome at her father's house. I seemed to find in her that warmth and gentleness which blend so gratefully with the colder nature of a man. And I, as many another one had done, felt that life held no greater end than to perfect that blending.

One day, when we were alone for an instant in the garden, she asked me if I had never loved. I knew not what to answer. I could have loved her easily, and that was my intention. But one would not speak of it so, to such a girl; so I smiled at her and told her I was sure I would, some day. Alas, I was but a youth and, in the flush of my own continence, knew not

the sweep of woman's nature. I displeased her, and I did not know why.

Then I went among the islands with my father—a trip which, a few months before, would have filled me with delight. But as I lay at night upon the deck of the boat, the moonlight filled me with a thousand memories and longings; and the new, strange sights of the days brought no light to my eyes.

When I returned, I sought the dwelling of my hopes. It stood serene in the moonlight and the song of insects arose from the garden where I had spent so many happy moments; but, within, despair was throned. For Aalea had left her parents and had given herself to the temple of the lascivious Aphrodite. She who would have been my wife and the mother of my son! Her father cursed her in a way that was terrible to hear.

I could not believe it. I drew my cloak

about me and sought her in the gardens of the temple. And a shameless girl directed me, laughing, to one of the little houses. There I found Aalea, indeed, with a vile Persian, while a drowsy-eyed slave-girl, looking elsewhere, idly waved a fan above their foul desire . . .

I remember rushing into that room and dashing my clenched fist into the face of the idolator. I burned; and in that burning my youth flashed up and then sank forever into ashes. I remember one look at my lost love, her tears, and her hand clutching my sleeve as I staggered out into the night. And a loud lamentation, as though her heart, rather than mine, had been broken . . .

Ah well! Peace came to me again, in time—the long peace and the comfort of the Mother who casts out all sorrow and all joy. But my heart never turned again to earthly love; and now I am an old man.

With the gods, there is no love nor torment nor burden, nor pulsing anger to wrench the spirit from its native element. But only silence, perfect peace, and shadows redolent of the highest mystery. And, thereafter, a blossom on the River of Death . . .

THE GREEK

Who shall be my love, this year? For it is spring; the breeze is sweet and the flowers are stirring within the earth. The ground is softer; the skies warmer. There are even green spots on the pastures.

Shall it be Lydia, who played with me last year? Her hair is golden, like wheat; her lips are soft; her white feet scarcely touch the herbs and grasses. She laughs joyously and is afraid of nothing.

Or shall it be Atthis, whose hair is brown and whom I have seen roving through the forests? Or Phyllis? Or Dorocleia?

Or shall it be—she whom I have not named—whose look is timid but very beautiful? I think I would prefer her; but she has never loved and perhaps she will not. She would protest and blush . . . I will speak to her, but I will give Lydia some flowers and a wooden bowl.

Upon a housetop beneath the white disc of the moon, Thersites, a Greek, sat with Crobyle and Antonius, who was a Roman soldier. The evening was pleasant. A soft wind blew from the west, bearing with it, now and then, the distant cry of some night-prowler on the desert beyond the tombs of the kings. Spread out on both sides of the silent river lay the crumbling city, Thebes, once mighty and still beautiful, spectral and aloof in the moonlight. Within its temples, old men still clung to well-nigh forgotten ceremonies of the gods. In the great buildings, fissures and breaks had appeared, stones had fallen. In the houses, a discontented and poverty-stricken people muttered and prayed and starved. Yet all these, all things which were small, misshapen, unhappy, were blotted out in the clean light and the dense shadows of the Egyptian night . . .

“It was there, at the edge of the culti-

vated ground," Antonius continued. "And when I saw her, I was speechless. She was a young girl, dressed like the Egyptians in the kalasiris; it was heavier than that affected by your city women, yet so light that, had it not been for her stola, it would have only shadowed the treasures beneath. One could see she might have disrobed without shame. Her cheeks were clear and light—almost too light for an Egyptian, but holding a delicate pallor, like the cheeks of an unhappy child. Her eyes were dark with an unknown depth, her lips were neither full nor thin, but red as the bloom of the desert rose. And her raised arms were full of flowers, innumerable flowers of all colors, which she held carefully against her young breast. An old woman was with her."

"Thou art poetic," observed Thersites.

"As thou wouldst have been. Hardly have I seen, in all Egypt, even at Alex-

andria, such perfect beauty . . . She would have passed me. 'Whither goest thou' I said, 'O daughter of Venus.' I think I frightened her. The old woman grasped her arm, and said to me, in barbarous Greek, 'She does not understand Greek. Leave us alone!' I reached into my cloak and displayed a handful of golden staters. 'Take these,' I said, 'and talk to her for me.' The old woman's gaze wavered; she was tempted but afraid. She hurried the girl away."

Antonius paused.

"She is interesting, your Egyptian maiden," observed Thersites. "I have seen her. Her father cultivates a garden for some priests. A disappointed priest himself, perhaps. At any rate, he keeps a watchful eye on his daughter as well as on his vegetables."

"That is nothing to me. I could have, in Rome, a thousand loves, without even

the asking. Why should I hesitate now, at a desire of my own, for an old man or a few gray-bearded priests? Besides, she is beautiful."

His eye shifted.

"No more so, I must admit, than Crobyle here, bounty of thy marvelous fortune, who has blessed me with so many smiles. But I would not venture, for all my bravery, a siege of Crobyle's experienced heart."

"Crobyle and I are hardly on speaking terms, these days," said Thersites, glancing from Antonius to the girl. "I think she enjoys provoking more fire than comes from such a temperament as mine. And she thinks my verses a poor substitute for more substantial adoration. What a shame she cannot leave me. Is it not so, my beloved?"

Crobyle would not answer. The Roman dwelt upon her for a moment.

“Of course,” he said, slowly, “My intention is to find a Crobyle for myself and I imagine she will find me fiery enough, this girl; at least, in her experience. But we soldiers have not the money power of such leisurely beings as thou art; what we want, and cannot buy, we must take by force.

“I followed the girl and found the house where she lives. The old woman stood upon the door-step; I believe I have bribed her. At least, I am going there tonight and I shall carry the girl away. I will make a Sabine of an Egyptian. That is why I have come to thee, as I have no other safe place to leave her until my boat sails tomorrow. Before any investigation can be made in this dead city, we shall be far away.”

Antonius arose, drained his cup and drew in his cloak. The city had become very still.

"Which reminds me," he said, "that it is time to go. If thou art willing, with the favor of the gods I will return very soon."

Thersites, a little disturbed, arose also.

"Bring her here, by all means. But I cannot say I approve thy project. There are innumerable women who, I think, would be more to thee than a young girl. At least, if thou must venture it, I beg of thee to shed no blood. The game is not worth that. For my shelter, wilt thou promise me this?"

"I will promise thee, unless it becomes a question of my life."

And Antonius went out quickly.

Thersites, leaning over the parapet, watched his departure. Crobyle spoke from the shadow of a couch.

"He is a fool."

The Greek turned to her.

"I grant thee that. But thou art a

woman and thou hast a reason for saying it which is not the same as mine. Just why, in thine opinion, is he a fool? . . .”

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A distant shout echoed among the houses. Silence. Then quick steps in the street. Antonius, breathing heavily, his arms wrapped tight about a muffled figure, stepped out on the roof.

“Quick, where can I put her,” he panted. “She is a fury. Look at her face. I am smothering her, but I am afraid she will scream.”

“Thou hast done it!” Thersites sprang forward. “This becomes suddenly interesting! Wait. I can speak to her in her own language. Let me see what I can do.”

Bending toward the girl’s head, he spoke quickly and at some length. He

paused on an interrogation; repeated it. A short, muffled word came from the captive.

"That is good," he said to Antonius. "Release her, now, she has promised me to be silent."

"What charm didst thou speak. She no longer struggles!"

Thersites smiled, but said nothing. The next moment, the young girl, half naked, trembling with fright and anger, stood in the moonlight. Her eyes sought Thersites and remained fixed on him. Antonius sat down, still breathing heavily.

"She is a wild animal. I spoke to her. I threatened and prayed. But the old woman, I suppose, told the truth, and she could not understand me. Will she remain as she is now?"

He took a step toward the girl. Her mouth opened, about to scream. Her hand

clutched Thersites' cloak. Antonius stopped, preplexed.

"Why does she turn to thee?" he said.

"Why not? She knows what to expect from thee, her ravisher. I am more of an unknown quantity."

With this, Thersites, watching the girl, spoke to her again; and his voice was very soft. Crobyle stirred on her cushions. Antonius watched curiously.

Thersites walked to the edge of the parapet and looked out over the city. Finally he turned.

"Friend," he said to the Roman, "I will bargain with thee. This girl is less afraid of me because I can speak to her. Perhaps she has divined, also, some other qualities which, at this moment, might appeal to her . . . Leave her with me—and take Crobyle with thee tomorrow. She will go with thee more willingly? Say, wilt thou?"

Antonius laughed suddenly, and arose.

“Dost thou hear that mad offer,” he asked Crobyle. “And wouldst thou go with me in place of this stripling?”

Crobyle’s warm voice replied from the shadows.

“I would go with thee, and gladly,” she said.

“Then, my foolish friend, I accept thy bargain. I will take Venus; thou mayest have Tisiphone.”

“And may Venus bring thee joy.”

Thersites turned to the girl.

“Thou mayest go,” he said. “My girl Crobyle loves this soldier and will take thy place. I am sorry thou wert frightened.”

The girl looked searchingly at him. He returned a smiling look, without mockery. Watching the three people, she seemed to understand what had taken place. Still

watching, she took a step backward, another, then disappeared through the door. Antonius watched in amazement.

“Thou hast sent her away!”

“Yes. We are both satisfied, thou and I.”

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The next evening, Thersites sat alone upon the house-top. His calm held no expectation and no regret. A new poem, neatly copied on papyrus, was in his hand, and his voice rose and fell softly.

A servant appeared at the door.

“There is an Egyptian girl below, who asks to see thee,” he said. “She has flowers in her arms.”

THE PHARAOH

*Thou art a sorceress with thine eyes blue
as the sky and thine hair where the sun-
light gleams enmeshed.*

*Who, in past ages, stole thee from those
languid beaches where the sunny waters
ripple and where the cadenced songs of
the Sirens rise to enchant the hearts of
men? Or didst thou come from the
shadowy woodland, born of some clear,
cool spring and the sunbeams glancing
among the trees?*

*Even the least word of thy lips is like
a song; the glory of thine eyes is priceless
happiness; within thine arms, one could
dream forever or burn forever insatiate.
And when thou smilest . . . I am a god in
the wonder of that smile.*

The city of Alexandria clamored beneath the full moon. From one end to the other, the mass of colonnades, temples and houses, from the Pharos to Rhacotis, quivered with a tide of life and movement, mingled with music and laughter. In the Royal Palace, the banquet hall of the Pharaohs blazed with lights and resounded, above the rumor of the city; for Ptolemy the Twelfth, Auletes Nothus Dionysos, was pleased to feast the elect of his kingdom.

Lying on the couches about the tables in the great hall were the chief priests of the city, priests of Isis, Amon, Serapis, Zeus and Aphrodite, teachers and philosophers from the schools, chief functionaries and officers, the most important visitors on the lists of the city, and a sprinkling of keen-eyed Romans. Auletes, in the prime of his life, quick, graceful, lay at a table slightly raised on a dais. At his

right hand, Quintus Secundus, from the Roman Republic, at his left Nargases, Hight Priest of Amon. His idle hand caressed the head of a tamed lioness of whom he was passionately fond and who stretched her neck over the edge of the couch, with half closed eyes. At his feet, behind him, stood a group of slave girls, attentive, of selected beauty, nude except for their conventional girdles.

All about, a host of slaves ministered to the guests with a profusion of meats and viands, oysters, lampreys, quails, roasted swans, wild boar, sauces and relishes, cakes of various grains mingled with honey, fruits and sherbets: all that the caprices of taste could suggest, was present in abundance. Kraters of rich wine, cooled in snow brought laboriously from great distances, were wheeled about, emptied and refilled.

The guests ate and drank copiously, fur-

tively loosening their bright-colored, heavy ceremonial robes as the banquet progressed.

Auletes brooded, amidst the festival.

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Above, in her chamber overlooking the sea, his Idumean wife, beautiful as a goddess, lay with her new-born child; a daughter: his fourth daughter. Berenice, his sister, had borne him three daughters and had died. It was not unfitting for her to die. He had hoped now, for a son, for an heir beyond question to the kingdom he had so struggled to hold. The oracles had, in fact promised him a child who should rule Egypt; this very priest, Nargases, had assured him of it. So he had expected a son; but the oracles had deceived men since time began. He was bitterly disappointed. A son and heir held aloft to meet the plaudits of a nation . . .

What chance had Egypt, in the hands of a woman, before the Roman wolves? Osiris blast them with their big hands and urbane, smiling faces! . . . A daughter—a plaything for the sons of other men! Should he beget only playthings for the sons of other men? . . .

His eye caught a glimpse of mobile flesh.

True, women were not without power; he knew that. Their way was different from that of a man, but, forewarned, they were not without resource. Hatshepsu had ruled; no one had known her for a woman . . . The glory of the Lagidae was a heavy trust. He himself had bribed the Romans with prodigious sums. A son might bribe again, or fight. A daughter—true, a daughter might obtain again all the riches, and more. That was not beyond thought. The Romans, his enemies,

who cast covetous eyes on his kingdom: they were notoriously weak before women.

He gazed intently at Quintus, who lay silent, a half smile on his lips, watching the slave girls. Auletes followed his glance toward a girl with plumb, languorous limbs.

This Roman had been recalled and was leaving at sunrise; yet, even this slave girl might tempt him to delay. And the famous Caesar—did not his soldiers, in his Triumph, cry “Romans, look to your wives!” and call him “Adulterer”, laughing the while, and without rebuke? With this Caesar, if he lived, or with another like him, Egypt had to deal, Egypt and the glory of Egypt on the flushed brow of a woman.

If this should be the will of the gods, he, Auletes, would prepare her. Every artifice and cunning strategy known to men, every scheme to make power of her

weakness, every ingenuity and play of love: she should be taught all these things. The most subtle ministers should assist her; the most skilled priests of Aphrodite should reveal their greatest secrets and their most voluptuous arts. He would sacrifice heavily to the goddess whose true art could make the strongest men pliable as wax. Perhaps the oracle had not deceived him. He could, at least, fit this girl for the smile of the gods and the weakness of men . . . More than one kingdom had balanced on a woman's smile.

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The Roman's cool voice aroused him.

"Thou shouldst rejoice, with thy guests, at the birth of thy daughter. I drink her health, and thine."

"For that, I thank thee. Didst thou know?—The oracles say she shall rule

over Egypt. What thinkest thou of that?"

The Roman was polite.

"It is not impossible. Women have ruled."

Auletes was silent; but slowly, at some inward thought, at a new hope, and for the first time that evening, he smiled.

THE SHEPHERDESS

Eternal waters, beating upon this desolate land, sing to me of the happy isles, of the distant shores of Hellas. Soft wind of the sea, bring me the perfume of pines and of roses, an echo of the brooklets of Arcadia.

Where the meadows flow upon the low slopes of the hills; where the warm air murmurs with the distant song of summer; where the sunlight glows upon the woodflowers among the trees . . .

When I leave this burning desert: when I can forget the dark aliens, the dusty cities, the clamorous roadstead: I will return to thee, Land of my Youth. An old man, I will return to thee; I will set my feet upon the track of the satyrs; I will cool my face in thy springs and lay my hand upon the quivering bosom of thy hills.

Upon a warm and perfumed day of summer, on the Isle of Cyprus, where the meadows, rich with grain and flowers, smiled up toward the sky, Lysidice, herself slender and fair as a flower, stood before the image of Pan, in a little grove of trees.

“Lord of the Woods and Fields:” she said, “See, I have brought thee a coronal of the oleander which thou lovest, and a bowl of fresh milk from the goats. For thou art my friend, and a friend of the shepherds, and these gifts from my hand will please thee.”

It pleased her, also to bring the offerings, because she believed in Pan. To him and to Demeter she owed thanks for all she had. Demeter was mysterious—almost unknown—inscrutable; but Pan was very real. So real indeed that, for all his kindness, one would not go alone into the grove at night, even when there was moonlight

. . . Clio, who was married, had done it. She had returned, blushing; but would not tell what she had seen . . . But Pan had no secrets from the summer sun.

All about, the leaves and branches cast shadow tracings on the warm grass. The bees droned from flower to flower upon their endless tasks and, from a distance, over the fields, came the soft call of a shepherd's pipes.

Lysidice was very happy, for the smiling world was kind to her and she loved the trees and the flowers. She was no longer a child. Since the winter past, she had been a woman grown; and soon, perhaps, she would be a wife. Already the coronals were not wanting at her door; and Lacon, who was browned by the sun and smooth-limbed as Adonis, had offered to teach her how to play on his pipes. Her heart was full from the very joy of being alive, feeling about her the warm

air and the wide world full of a thousand happy mysteries and promises.

When she had placed the coronal upon the image of the god, she moved slowly about under the trees, listening to the distant syrinx. The song of the pipes had been gentle as a breeze but, as she listened, the slender melody changed, grew louder, more vibrant and shrill. Lysidice did not know who played, but her light steps quickened to the hurrying notes and soon she danced over the grass, waving her arms and turning her sweet face up toward the green leaves murmuring overhead.

An old man, passing the edge of the grove, saw the bright, dancing figure.

“There was a time when I, also, danced,” he murmured to himself as he moved away. “I danced, yes, and others with me. But those days are past. Now it is the young ones’ turn . . . It is not for long that they

dance alone; Pan and Aphrodite will take care of that.”

After the old man, came laughter upon the path which led across the fields. Lysidice stopped dancing, suddenly. Looking out from among the trees, she saw a group of young men and girls. They were not dressed like the people she usually saw; their tunics were of gaily-colored cloth; she caught the gleam of jewels; and she knew they must be holiday-makers from Paphos. She did not want to meet them, for she was very timid. Beside—there were courtesans at Paphos who would go anywhere and do anything; perhaps these girls were like that. She would be afraid of them . . . She slipped away through the little grove.

But the bright eyes of young Archias had seen her, as she stood poised for an instant, like a shy hamadryad. He saw clearly that she was beautiful; far more so

than any girl he had ever seen. He forgot his companions and, as these gathered about him, laughing and questioning, they were gross. Lysidice had disappeared and he would tell them nothing.

“Pan frightened him,” they said. “See, there he stands, watching us from those trees. He is a shepherds’ god and probably dislikes us.”

They also heard the distant pipes which shrilled now, darting gleaming, mad notes across the fields; and, like Lysidice, they also danced among the trees, waving their arms and turning their faces upward toward the green leaves murmuring overhead. But they did not dance alone, for the notes of the pipes were notes of ecstasy and of union and of life.

Archias wished to dance also, but did not. He was thinking of the girl they had frightened away and, more than anything else, he wanted to see her again. He heard

the melody of the syrinx, and the song seemed to speak directly to his heart of the flowers and the open sky and of strange things which, until then, he had never known. The pleasure trip with his companions was suddenly distasteful to him. He would prefer to see the shepherd girl again, if he could, without frightening her . . . he turned back, the way they had come; and when the others were weary of their dancing, they moved out from the trees, along the path, without Archias, whom they could not find.

A cicada shrilled, unseen among the grasses. A bird, deep in the blue sky, sang praises to the glory of the fields.

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Across the path, a shepherd gazed down at his limbs overhung with a finer cloak

of purple than he had ever expected to own. Archias, covered with a rough goat-skin, returned to the grove and sat down upon the grass near Pan to wait.

The flower-crowned image stared with unseeing eyes. But it is possible the lips curved in a slight smile when Lysidice returned, cautiously, through the grove.

Her wide eyes saw the stranger seated upon the grass, but she was not frightened, for she saw many others like him, each day among the fields. Yet, he was different . . . She hesitated, but his smile warmed her; and after a moment, at his bidding, she even consented to sit beside him.

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The day was passing. The shadows slowly deepened among the trees and the first faint breath of evening stirred the

drowsy flowers. Far out on the fields, the syrinx awoke gently, with a song of twilight calling the scattered flocks.

Lysidice was going home; and with her was going, not Archias of Paphos, but Archias the lover, on whom Pan smiled . . .

The old man, returning by the grove, saw the two young figures.

“It is not for long that they dance alone,” he murmured to himself. “There was a time when I, also . . .”



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